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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the uses and misuses of occupational information. Several points are made concerning misuse: 1) The Occupational Outlook Handbook needs to be read and interpreted rather than just handed out; 2) too much material is outdated; 3) many materials are biased and need to be replaced; 4) counselors should read all material before passing it out; 5) career conference days need revision so students can attend more meetings; 6) use alumni and students for current job information; 7) the two-week unit on occupations taught by a disinterested person is a great source of misinformation; and 8) a course in occupations taught by a counselor can be made very worthwhile. Some activities which can achieve positive results are to: 1) make an annual follow-up study of dropouts and graduates to evaluate previous guidance, and 2) arrange plant tours where alumni work. An outline of a minimum program of occupational information for a high school or college is included. (KJ)

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The Use and Misuse of Occupational Information

by

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OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Some time ago, in the City of Cincinnati, 1658 students in 35 public schools were asked to state their occupational choices. The results of this inquiry were summarized by Dale[1] in these words:

"What would Cincinnati be like if these students became the sole inhabitants of the city in the jobs of their choice, ten years from now?... Health services would be very high, with every eighteen people supporting one doctor...It may be, however, that they would all be needed in a city that had no garbage disposal workers, no laundry workers, and no water supply, since no one chose to do that kind of work...The two bus drivers ...will find that their customers get tired of waiting, and use the services of the sixty-seven airline pilots. It may be difficult getting to Crosley Field to see the forty baseball players."

There have been many other studies of the occupational plans and expectations of school and college students. Most of these studies reveal a disturbing discrepency between what the students expect to do and what our follow-up studies reveal that they actually will do.

Within a few months or a few years, your students will terminate their full-time, formal education. They will drop out, or they will graduate, from high school or from college, and they will go out to look for a job.

Some of them will not find a job in the occupation for which they have prepared, because in that occupation there will be more people than there are jobs. Some of them will have their choice of several jobs because they have prepared for occupations in which there are more jobs than there are people.

Some of them will find jobs that they like, that they do well. Some

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[1]Dale, R.V.H. "To Youth Who Choose Blindly" April, 1948. Occupations. Page 419.

of them will discover, after years of preparation, that the work they are doing is quite different from what they expected. And they won't like it. So they will change jobs and start over.

Some of them will start over two or three times before they find a job that they like. And some of them never will find one; they will dislike and resent their work for the rest of their lives. A few of them may even find themselves among the unemployed. Most of them will eventually find a job that they can do reasonably well. But they may go through some rough times before they find it.

After 5 or 10 or 20 years in one occupation, some of them will find that automation, or a business failure, or a corporate merger, or a war, or some other economic or social change has eliminated the job on which they depend for their bread and butter. They will have to start over, and maybe go through the whole process of vocational choice again.

These students of yours will discover that their occupations affect their lives in many ways that they had not anticipated. The job will determine where they will live and how often they will move. The job will help to determine the persons they meet. It will affect their choice of friends, and maybe the persons they will marry. The job will strengthen or it will aggravate their feelings of success or failure, their feelings of satisfaction or frustration, their feelings of acceptance or rejection; and thus it will help to determine their mental health. In subtle ways which they will not even recognize, the job will change their values, their ideals, their standards, It will determine both the economic and the social status of their families, and the amount of time the family can spend together.

When people face such an important decision, why are their career plans

so unrealistic? One reason, I suspect, is because we spend so much time talking with them about what they would like to do and so little time talking about whether or not anyone in this whole wide world will ever pay them to do it.

Another reason why people make such unrealistic choices may be that we do not do quite so good a job as we might do when our students (and clients) ask us for facts about jobs.

May I suggest some questions for you to ask yourselves? Perhaps the answers will suggest to you some changes you would like to make in what you are now doing with occupational information.

When a student comes to you to discuss his occupational interests, do you ask if he would like to consider the supply and demand for workers? Do you suggest that he consult the Occupational Outlook Handbook? You do? Have you ever read the Occupational Outlook Handbook? Have you read the parts you are sending him to read?

Will you do a little role playing with me? Let me read to you some excerpts from the Occupational Outlook Handbook, and will you ask yourselves what inferences you would have drawn from these statements when you were a high school student.

"OPPORTUNITIES for talented COMMERCIAL ARTISTS are expected to be GOOD."

"Well-qualified BEGINNERS with WRITING talent will have GOOD employment opportunities."

"Editors were ACTIVELY SEEKING YOUNG REPORTERS with exceptional talent."

"EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES are FAVORABLE for talented and well-trained PHOTOGRAPHERS. People with less ability and training are likely to encounter keen competition."

Can't you imagine a good many students of average ability reading these statements and inferring that the employment outlook in these occupations

is pretty good?

Let me read these statements again as a sophisticated counselor might read them.

"Opportunities for TALENTED commercial artists are expected to be good."

"WELL-QUALIFIED beginners with writing TALENT will have good employment opportunities."

"Editors were actively seeking young reporters with EXCEPTIONAL TALENT."

"Employment opportunities are favorable for TALENTED and WELL-TRAINED photographers. People with LESS ability and training are likely to encounter KEEN competition."

Now compare what the handbook says on home economists: NOT ENOUGH GRADUATES to satisfy the demand," and on trained librarians: "A nationwide SHORTAGE." There is no mention here of being "talented" or "well-qualified" or even "WELL-trained." The shortage extends even to average and sub-average graduates.

The Occupational Outlook Handbook is the most widely used source of occupational information in American high schools today. It is the best source of information that we have on occupational outlook. But even the Occupational Outlook Handbook needs to be read and interpreted with a level of sophistication which the average high school or college student does not possess, and which too many of us have not bothered to acquire. Despite its vocabulary the Occupational Outlook Handbook can be read by 5th and 6th grade students and understood well enough for them to enjoy it. Despite its simplicity it can be misinterpreted even by a college student.

There are four things for the counselor to do about the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

1. Buy it. Some schools put a copy in every homeroom.
2. Replace it as each new edition comes out.
3. Remember that all outlook predictions are based upon two assumptions--

no major war and no severe economic depression.

4. Help your clients to read it and to understand it.

Do you sometimes send your students to your occupational pamphlet files to learn more about the occupations they are considering? Nearly every high school in this country now has a file of occupational pamphlets to which new publications are added from time to time and from which no one ever throws anything away.

Mrs. Hoppock and I once undertook to renovate an occupational pamphlet file for one of our neighboring high schools on Long Island. From that file we removed 900 items that were more than 5 years old; 300 of these were more than 10 years old; and 20 were more than 20 years old.

The next time you visit your school library go look at the shelf of occupational books. Check the copyright dates and see if you do not find at least one book that is 25 years old, on the same shelf with books published last year, and with nothing to warn the trusting young reader that the old book may now be just a volume of misinformation.

A few years ago I was asked to help with a New York University survey of one of our better school in Westchester County. I asked the high school librarian if I might see the occupational information materials which she supplied to inquiring students. She pointed to some sets of pamphlets on the top of some filing cabinets. Among them was a set published during the depression of the nineteen-thrities. I pulled out the pamphlet on Geology and looked to see what it said on earnings. It said that the average college graduate geologist might expect about two promotions during his career, and that his highest annual earnings would be in the neighborhood of $3,500. At the time I was reading this pamphlet the entry salary for geologists in the Federal civil service was around $5,000.

One of our public librarians in Nassau County once purchased a complete set of occupational pamphlets from one of our oldest and best known publishers. She proudly showed them to me; then she made the mistake of asking me what I thought of them. I asked for a few minutes to examine them. At the end of an hour of searching in the fine print for the well concealed copyright dates, I took her a list of them Two-thirds of those pamphlets were more than five years old when she bought them, and several went back ten or fifteen years. The librarian wrote an indignant letter to the publishers and got her money back.

When you finish in the library go look at the pamphlet collection in your own office. See what you turn to, or what you refer your unsuspecting students to, when they want facts about jobs.

See if you don't find a disturbingly large number of recruiting pamphlets from schools that want more students and from employers who want more applicants. Do you want your students to get their career information from a recruiting agent? Is that where you would go for your information?

Some years ago I received a free pamphlet on Chemical Engineering as a Profession. from one of our accredited and respected engineering colleges. Four pages were devoted to chemical engineering as a career. Eight pages told the reader what a fine college this was. In discussing the occupation the author wrote, and I quote verbatim, "Any boy who is willing to work hard can succeed as a chemical engineer".

Is this what you want to put in the hands of the high school student whose ambitions already exceed his abilities? This is what your students may be reading when you give them pamphlets that you

have not read yourself.

If you would like to improve your pamphlet collection, get a couple of intelligent students to go through the file and remove every document that is more than 5 years old, and every document that has no date on it. The next time you win a football game, take these out and burn them.

Have the same students put the copyright date on the front cover of every pamphlet that you retain. Put the copyright date on the front cover of every new document that you add to the file from now on. If the document has no copyright date put on the front cover the date that you receive it.

Once every year have your student helpers go through the file again and remove all the pamphlets that are now five years old, and burn them.

Before you put any new publication in the files or on the shelves, get some local parent who is in the occupation to read the pamphlet and tell you what he thinks of it.

When you refer one of your students to your file of occupational information, you go with him. You help him to select the materials he will read. You teach him to look for the copyright date. You show him how misleading salary data can be when they are not given in the form of up-to-date medians, of comparable populations. You explain the dangers of recruiting literature that emphasizes the attractions of the occupation and says little about the disadvantages. And don't you dare give him anything that you have not read yourself, unless you stay there and read it with him. This will take time. But if you do not do it, you will never know how much misinformation you are passing out.

The way most of us use occupational information resembles the practice of a physician who exists only in my imagination but whom I find useful for purposes of illustration. You go to see this physician, and you say "Doctor, I have a back ache." He says "Tell me about it." So you tell him about it. When you finish he says "Yes. You have a back ache all right. What would you like to do about it?" You say "I'd like to know how to cure it." He says "Out there in the waiting room you may have noticed that the walls are covered with shelves and the shelves are filled with bottles of pills. If you look at them carefully you will find one shelf that is labeled "Back Ache Pills." Now I do not know what is in those pills. I do not know much about the people who make them. But they say those pills are good for back aches. So you go look them over and pick out the ones you would like to try and take them home with you and maybe they will cure your back ache." This is silly, of course. But isn't this just about what we do with occupational pamphlets?

Perhaps the next most common practice in occupational orientation is the annual career conference. The career conference has some obvious values. You get information from original sources. It is usually up to date. And it includes information on local employment opportunities.

The annual career conference also has some disadvantages. Most students can attend only one or two group meetings in one day; they may wish to attend several. You have to take speakers you can get on the date you have set for your conference. This sometimes forces you to accept your second or third choice person. You may even, in desperation, take one person from the worst possible source - the recruiting office of a school with a dubious reputation. The counselor can be present in only one meeting at a time. He has no idea how much

recruiting or bad counseling is going on in the other groups. And the single annual career conference, the big whing- ding with its twenty side shows, creates a bulge in the demand for individual counseling which is greater than any staff can handle promptly.

To keep the values of the career conference, and get rid of these disadvantages, some of the better schools have dropped the big annual meeting and substituted a series of weekly group conferences, covering one occupation each week. Under this arrangement any student can attend as many conferences as he likes; some students have gone to ten or more. If your best speaker cannot come on one date you can reschedule him for another. You spread the resultant demand for counseling more evenly over the whole year. And you can be present in every meeting to see what goes on. Incidentally you may learn something yourself, since Lifton has shown us that the occupations which produce most of the jobs are the occupations about which teachers know the least.

Whether you run your career conferences once a week or once a year, may I urge you to include some of your own young alumni among your resource experts. You will get some fascinating, realistic information that you never got before. Here is a list of questions you can use for group conferences with alumni:

Questions for Group Conferences with Employed Alumni

What schools did you attend?

Did you graduate? Drop out? When?

What was your first job?
- How did you get it?
- What did you like most about it? Least?
- How long were you there?
- Why did you leave?

What was your next job?
- Same questions as above.
- Repeat for all subsequent jobs.

Re present job, ask also
What time did you go to work this morning?
What was the first thing you did?
How long did that take?
What did you do next?
Repeat through the entire day
Did you do anything yesterday that was different from what you did today?
How about the day before yesterday? Last week? Last month:
What else do you do on your job?
Of all these various duties, which ones take most of your time?

What is the usual starting salary in jobs like yours?

What qualifications do you need to get the job?
Age? Sex? Height? Weight? Other physical?
Marital status? Tools? License? Aptitudes?
Unions? Discrimination? Veterans? Capital?

Preparation? Minimum? Desirable? Time? Cost?
Content? Approved schools? Preferred subjects?

Supply and demand for workers? Outlook for the future?
Advancement?

Hours? Regular? Overtime? Evening? Sunday? Holiday?

Steady or seasonal? Hazards? Marriage rate?

Anything we should have asked?
You ask us? Thanks.

Adapted from Occupational Information, third edition, by Robert Hoppock, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1967.

If you ever have to substitute for an absent teacher ask the class how many of them have ever had a part-time job. Put a list of these jobs on the blackboard. Ask the class how many of them would like to know more about any of these jobs. Pick a popular job. Ask the student who had it to take your place at the desk. Invite the students to ask him anything they would like to know about the job that he had.

If they are slow in responding, you ask some questions. What did he like best about his job? What did he like least? How did he

get it? What were all the things he had to do in this job? Would he have any advice for a student who wanted to get a job like his?

If your experience is like that of my students who have tried this you will be pleasantly surprised by the interest of the group, by the useful information your students can supply, and by your own enjoyment of what is often an unwelcome chore.

A frequent source of misinformation for the high school student is the two-week unit on occupations in 9th or 12th grade social studies, taught by a history teacher who doesn't want to teach it, who does not know how to teach it, and who doesn't know much more about occupations than the kids in the class.

In a study of 389 schools in New York State, Hamel[1] found that the teachers of these units felt that the subject of occupations was worthwhile, that the time devoted to it should be extended to a full semester or a full year, that it should be offered as a separate course in 11th or 12th grade, and taught by the counselor or by a teacher especially trained and hired to teach occupations. I heartily concur in these recommendations.

The course in occupations, when it is well taught by a competent counselor, is one of the few techniques of guidance on which we do have some evidence of success, in terms of the ultimate criteria of self-support and job satisfaction.

Cuony taught a course in job finding and job orientation to an experimental group of thirty-five high school seniors in Geneva, N.Y. One year after graduation he compared them with an equated control group from the same class of the same school. The students

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1 Hamel, L.B., "A Survey of the Teaching of Occupations in New York State Secondary Schools", doctoral thesis, St. John's University, Jamaica, N.Y. 1961.

who had had the course were better satisfied with their jobs than those who had not had the course. The combined annual earnings of the experimental group exceeded those of the control group by $7719; the course cost $1542. Among the experimental group, 29% more liked their jobs. Among the controls, 50% more had thought seriously of changing their jobs.

Five years after graduation Cuony again compared the two groups. During the fifth year the students who had had the course were still better satisfied with their jobs, were unemployed less frequently, and again earned more money than those who had not had the course. All differences were greater at the end of the fifth year than at the end of the first.

When a student comes to you for help in selecting a career objective, and in choosing a college in which to prepare for it, and you help him, do you follow up later on to find out how good your guidance was? Do you know how many of your students were able to implement the plans that you helped them to make? Do you know how many found their objectives unattainable?

How many bright young girls, with excellent grades in English have you encouraged, and sent off to college, to prepare for a career in publishing? How many of them made it? Do you know? The Macmillan Company hires bright young college graduates as editorial assistants. In one year they hired 4 such persons. For those 4 jobs they had 600 applications. But they could not find enough good stenographers. What do you suppose would happen to any manufacturer who knew as little about what happens to his product as we know about what happens to ours?

If you really want to do a good job of career counseling the first and most important thing you have to do is to make an annual follow-

up study of all the pupils who dropped out or graduated from your school in the past year, and of the others who have been gone long enough to have completed their higher education and military or alternate service and to have obtained full-time employment. Find out what they are doing now, and how their jobs compare with the objectives which you helped them to set for themselves and with the occupations for which your school prepared them.

This information is basic to any effective career counseling or occupational education. Good schools do this regularly. They get responses from 95% to 100%. It takes work but it can be done. It need not be expensive. If you have a course in occupations, or even a good unit, or an active career club, your students can help you to plan and to conduct the study. They can address and mail the letters, make the telephone calls and the home visits, tabulate, discuss and analyze the results.

Once this job is done you can arrange plant tours to places that have hired your graduates and your dropouts and that are likely to have jobs for your students in the future. You can arrange group conferences with your alumni as your resource people. You can tell your present students what kinds of jobs will be open to them when they finish your curricula and what kinds will not. You can tell them what happened to former students who had the same unrealistic expectations on which they are basing their plans.

There are some interesting experiments now under way in the use of data processing equipment to simplify the distribution and the revision of occupational information. One of these was started in San Diego County a few years ago; it uses 3M machines and aperture cards. It is described in the March 1967 Vocational Guidance Quarterly,

which I am sure many of you have read, so I shall not repeat the description here.

If you are young and energetic and eager to do a really good job with occupational information, if you still have 25 years of work ahead of you, if you want to look forward to the day when you will have the time, the staff, and the resources to do what needs to be done then let me offer you a minimum program of occupational information services for an accredited high school or college.

1. An annual follow-up of the dropouts and graduates of the preceeding twelve months, and of others who have been gone long enough to have completed their higher education and military or alternate service and to have obtained full-time employment. Tabulation of the present occupations and employers of all respondents. Distribution of this tabulation to all students and staff.

2. An annual survey of entry jobs expected to be available to dropouts and graduates in the year ahead. Tabulation of job titles, employers and employers' addresses. Distribution of this tabulation to all students and staff.

3. Plant tours to the principal sources of employment as revealed by follow-up studies and surveys of entry jobs. At least one tour a month, arranged and conducted by the school counselor, the college placement officer, or the teacher of occupations.

4. Group conferences with employed alumni in a wide range of occupations. Admission open to all interested students, staff, and parents. At least one such conference a week, arranged and conducted by the school counselor, the college placement officer, or the teacher of occupations.

5. Tape recordings of all group conferences, indexed by oc-

cupation, industry, and employer, with the date of the conference recorded on the tape itself and clearly labeled on the container. Tapes filed with occupational books and used as a source of occupational information in counseling. All tapes removed from current use when five years old.

6. An occupational information file in which no publication is more than five years old and all publications have been reviewed and approved by someone employed in the occupation. All recruiting materials labeled as such.

7. An elective course in occupations for terminal students and prospective dropouts taught by a person who has been adequately trained to teach this subject.

8. Appointment of an experienced counselor as Supervisor of Occupational Information, with a roving commission to do everything he can to improve the accuracy and adequacy of the occupational information made available to students by counselors, teachers, librarians, placement officers, psychologists, social workers, and all other members of the school or college staff. In school systems that are large enough to have full-time supervisors of other subjects, such as music, the supervisor of occupational information should have no other responsibilities.

We will never get good occupational information services in most of our schools until we do have one person who is hired, and paid, and promoted because of his competence in occupational information.

Gradually, we are accumulating evidence of what you can do with good occupational information. For example:

Weitz[2] compared two groups of life insurance agents to see if he could reduce the percentage who terminated their jobs within their first six months. Before they were hired, the experimental group received an illustrated booklet that described the typical activities of an agent and the time spent in each activity. The control group did not receive the booklet. Turnover within the experimenatl group was 30 percent lower than in the control group.

In a similar experiment by Youngberg[3] in another company, the experimental group received a recruiting booklet that presented both the advantages and the disadvantages of becoming a life insurance agent. The booklet clearly and candidly stated the disappointments and frustrations an agent faces and asked "How would you react to problems like these? Could you take them in stride?" The control group in this experiment received the usual type of recruiting literature that emphasized the positive aspects of the agent's job. Turnover in the first six months was 33 percent lower in the experimental group. Subsequent follow-up[4] at six month intervals revealed that the experimental group continued to show fewer terminations over a total period of two years.

We in counseling and guidance have only begun to tap the potential of what can be done when we get good occupational information to the right person at the right time.

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[2] Weitz, J.: "Job Expectancy and Survival," Journal of Applied Psychology, August, 1956, p. 245

[3] Youngberg, C.F.: "An Experimental Study of 'Job Satisfaction' and Turnover in Relation to Job Expectations and Self Expectations," doctoral thesis, New York University Graduate School of Arts and Science, 1963, summaraized in "Realistic" Job Expectations and Survival, Life Insurance Agency Management Association, Hartford, Conn., 1964

[4] Youngberg, C.F.: Letter to R. Hoppock, Nov. 30, 1965.

So much for what you can do. Now why should you bother with all this? Because so many of your students are going to have to change their present occupational plans. Because we know that some of these changes can be made while the students are still in school, and that these changes can make the occupational plans of students more realistic.

In one school system, eleventh and twelfth grade students were told about local employment opportunities. The simple presentation of these facts reduced by one-half the percentage of students who chose some of the overcrowded occupations. It doubled the percentage of students who chose some of the jobs in which workers were really in demand.

Obviously we do not expect perfection. We do not expect every fourth grade pupil to choose a career and never change his mind again. But in this long, slow process of vocational development we do expect that some of our students will make more progress toward better ultimate choices if we can help them to think in terms of reality instead of fantasy.

Whether you are a counselor, a teacher, or an administrator, whenever a young person asks you for facts about jobs, what you do will either help him or hinder him in his search for an occupation in which he can find a job, in which he can be useful, and in which he can find a degree of satisfaction comparable to the satisfaction that you find in your work.

If you are not an expert in occupations, remember that your students believe you are. For as long as they have been in school they have been in a place in which the teacher is always right. If you carelessly or thoughtlessly or ignorantly give your students misinformation they will

assume that it is true. If you casually refer them to some other source of occupational information your students will assume that source to be infallible--accurate in every detail.

These kids trust you. Before you dismiss that trust lightly, remember: It is just as easy to misinterpret occupational information as it is to misinterpret a psychological test--and just as dangerous.

Every day unsuspecting students are being misinformed and misled by their own innocent interpretations of what they learn from uninformed teachers from careless counselors and from printed materials which can be read intelligibly only by persons with far more sophistication than these kids possess.

When it is all over and the good Lord up above says to you "These were hungry. Did you feed them?" What will you say?

Will it be "Well, you see, Lord, we didn't believe in spoon feeding them. We set up a good library and we let them use it. Of course, they did make a few mistakes. Some of them spent 4 years preparing for jobs they never got. Some of them were pretty unhappy about the jobs they did get. And I guess we had more unemployed alumni than some other schools. But, you know, Lord, we always figured they would learn from their mistakes."

Will it be "Listen Lord, by the time I interviewed all the failures, and planned all the schedules, and got off all the college transcripts, I hardly had time to eat myself, let alone feeding everybody else."

Will it be "Well Lord, our curriculum was pretty full. But we did put a unit on occupations in our social studies program. Of course,

the teacher didn't want to teach it and she didn't know much more than her students knew about occupations, but she tried.

Or will it be "Yes Lord, we made it our business to find out what our students needed to know about occupations. When we did not have the facts, we went out and got them. We made sure the information was accurate. Somehow we found the time to share this information with them and to help them understand it."